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The meeting of occupational therapists and their clients in initial interviews, and the place of counselling skills

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The author carried out research combining occupational therapy and counselling as she is both an occupational therapist and a counsellor. She was interested in the contribution counselling theory can make to occupational therapy. Three focus groups were carried out with occupational therapists to investigate their views and understanding of their meeting with clients, during initial interviews, and the place of counselling skills. A qualitative design was used, underpinned by phenomenology and hermeneutics. The project gained ethical approval from the local Health Service Regional Ethics Committee.

Five main topics emerged from the data how participants carry out interviews; what informs the participant; the meaning of initial interviews; OTs' possible move away from advising, informing and treating, including the issue of power and socially constructed defences.

Findings showed that OTs used an impressive number and range of counselling skills and core conditions, which were fundamental to their practice. An occupational focus was evident in initial interviews especially in building the therapeutic relationship. The majority of participants used a Fluent Approach (Secker 1993). The meaning of the interviews was identified as understanding the client's story; building the therapeutic relationship; information gathering; and building an occupational profile. The participants appeared to be moving away from treating and advising clients, showing evidence of empowering their clients, within challenging work settings. It was evident that some clearly struggled with the difficulties they faced in their daily work and that they may well have developed socially structured defence mechanisms (Menzies Lyth 1960) in order to protect themselves emotionally.

References

Secker J (1993), *From Theory to Practice in Social Work*; the development of social work students' practice, Aldershot, Avebury.

Menzies Lyth I (1960), *Social Systems as a Defence Against Anxiety*, Human Relations, 13 pp 95-121.

Presenter's CV

Linda Renton graduated in 1981, and worked in mental health for eight years. Since then she has been lecturing on under- and

post graduate occupational therapy programmes at Queen Margaret University. She has experience in curriculum design, programme validation and e-learning. She recently completed an MSc in Counselling Studies and she presently is a volunteer counsellor. For 14 years she has been involved in European work. Until last year she was the Secretary of the European Network of Occupational Therapists in Higher Education (ENOTHE). She was recently appointed as the First Alternate for the World Federation of Occupational Therapists by the College of Occupational Therapy in the UK.